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A CARD *and* A CORRECTION

A Broadside on Lincoln's Religion

by

WM. H. HERNDON

Springfield, Illinois

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NOVEMBER 9, 1882

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H E Barker

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A CARD AND A CORRECTION.

I wish to say a few short words to the public and private ear. About the year 1870 I wrote a letter to F. E. Abbot, then of Ohio, touching Mr. Lincoln's religion. In that letter I stated that Mr. Lincoln was an infidel, sometimes bordering on atheism, and I now repeat the same. In the year 1873 the Right Rev. James A. Reed, pastor and liar of this city, gave a lecture on Mr. Lincoln's religion, in which he tried to answer some things which I never asserted, except as to Lincoln's infidelity, which I did assert and now and here affirm. Mr. Lincoln was an infidel of the radical type; he never mentioned the name of Jesus, except to scorn and detest the idea of miraculous conception. This lecture of the withered minister will be found in *Holland's Review*.* I answered this lecture in 1874, I think, in this city to a large and intelligent audience—had it printed and sent a copy to Holland, requesting, in polite langauge, that he insert it in his *Review*, as an answer to the Reed lecture. The request was denied me, as a matter of course. He could help to libel a man with Christian courage, and with Christian cowardice refuse to *un*libel him.

Soon thereafter, say from 1874 to 1882, I saw floating around in the newspaper literature, such charges as "Herndon is in the lunatic asylum, well chained," "Herndon is a pauper," "Herndon is a drunkard," "Herndon is a vile infidel and a knave, a liar and a drunkard," and the like. I have contradicted all these things under my own hand often, except as to my so-called infidelity, liberalism, free religious opinions or what-not. In the month of October, 1882, I saw in and clipped out of the Cherryvale Globe-News of Sept., 1882, a paper published in the State of Kansas, the following rich and racy article; it is as follows:

"LINCOLN'S OLD LAW PARTNER A PAUPER.

"Bill Herndon is a pauper in Springfield, Ill. He was once worth considerable property. His mind was the most argumentative of any of the old lawyers in the State, and his memory was extraordinary.

"For several years before Lincoln was nominated for the Presidency, Herndon was in some respects the most active member of the firm, preparing the greatest number of cases for trial and making elaborate arguments in their behalf.

"It is said that he worked hard with Lincoln in preparing the memorable speeches delivered by the man who afterwards became President, during the debates between Lincoln and Douglas in 1858, and in constructing the Cooper Institute address delivered by Lincoln a short time before the war.

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"Herndon, with all his attainments, was a man who now and then went on a spree, and it was no uncommon thing for him to leave an important lawsuit and spend several days in drinking and carousing. This habit became worse after Lincoln's death, and like poor Dick Yates, Herndon went down step by step till his old friends and associates point to him as a common drunkard."

There are three distinct charges in the above article. First, That I am a pauper. Second, that I am a common drunkard, and third, that I was a traitor, or false to my clients. Let me answer these charges in their order. First, I am not a pauper, never have been and expect never to be. I am working on my own farm, making my own living with my own muscle and brain, a place and a calling that even Christianity with its persecution and malignity can never reach me to do me much harm. I had, it is true, once a considerable property, but lost much of it in the crash and consequent crisis of 1873, caused in part by the contraction of the currency, in part by the decline in the demand for agricultural products, which I raised for sale, in part by the inability of the people to buy, &c., &c., and for no other reasons. Second, I never was a *common* drunkard, as I look at it, and am not now. I am and have been for years an ardent and enthusiastic temperance man, though opposed to prohibition by law, by any force or other choker. The time has not come for this. It is a fact that I once, years ago, went on a spree; and this I now deeply regret. It however is in the past, and let a good life in the future bury the past. I have not fallen, I have risen, and all good men and women will applaud the deed, always excepting a small, little, bitter Christian like the Right Rev. pastor and liar of this city, to whom I can trace some of the above charges. In my case this minister was an eager, itching libeller, and what he said of me is false—nay, a willful lie. Third, I never was a traitor or untrue to my clients or their interests. I never left them during the progress of a trial or at other times for the causes alleged, drunkenness. I may have crept—slid—out of a case during the trial because I had no faith in it, leaving Mr. Lincoln, who had faith in it, to run it through. My want of faith in the case would have been discovered by the jury and that discovery would have damaged my client, and to save my client I dodged. This is all there is in it, and let men make the most of it.

Now let me ask a question. Why is all this libelling of me? I am a mere private citizen, hold no office, do not beg the good people to give me one often. My religious ideas, views and philosophy are to day, here, unpoplar. But wait, I will not deny my ideas, views or philosophy for office or station or the applause of the unthinking multitude. I can, however, answer the above question. It, the libelling, is done because I did assert and affirm by oral language and by print that Mr. Lincoln was an infidel, sometimes bordering on atheism, and yet he was among the best, greatest and noblest of mankind; he was a grand man. Why do not the Christians prove that Mr. Lincoln was an evangelical Christian, and thus prove me a liar. One of my friends for whom I have great respect, says, that "Mr. Lincoln was a *rational* Christian because he believed in morality." Why not say Mr. Lincoln was a *rational* Buddhist, as Buddhism teaches morality? Why not say Lincoln was a *rational* Mohamedan? By the way, let me say here, that I have a profound respect for an earnest, manly and sincere Christian or an atheist, a profound respect for an earnest, manly and sincere infidel or theist or any other religion, or the men who hold it, when that belief is woven into a great manly character to beautify and greaten the world.

These charges, and I do not know how many more, nor of what kind, have been scattered broadcast all over the land, and have gone into every house, have been read at every fireside, till the good people believe them, believe that I am nearly as mean as a little Christian, and *all because I told the truth and stand firm to my convictions.*

Respectfully,

W. H. HERNDON.

SPRINGFIELD, ILL., Nov. 9, 1882.

*Herndon it seems, had forgotten that the name of "Holland's Review" had been changed to "Lothrop's Monthly." W.H.T.